

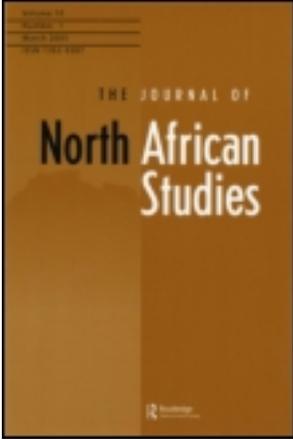
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Rebels with a pen: observations on the newly emerging media landscape in Libya

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The role of social media as a catalyst of the ‘Arab Spring’ has been subject to much debate – both by academics and the press. Likewise, the impact of international media, such as *Al-Jazeera*, has been thoroughly examined elsewhere. While acknowledging the significance of these players, this article explores the emergence of a new landscape of local print and broadcast media in revolutionary Libya that is both the result of the dramatic changes that the country has undergone and one of their facilitators. This article analyses the political impact of these new forms of media during and after the 2011 Libyan uprisings, with an emphasis on how the role and the self-image of journalists and media producers has evolved alongside with Libya’s political transformation. It is demonstrated that the new Libyan media began their life as ‘partisan advocates’ and that different societal currents are now struggling to set the new role of media. It concludes with an analysis of the newly implemented legal framework and institutions which govern the Libyan media. It remains unclear if recent legislation will protect independent media from the authorities or, conversely, allow the state to exert censorship and consolidate its ownership over the media. This article analyses the various approaches to media jurisdiction prevalent in post-Qadhafi Libya as reflecting various degrees of state intervention. This discussion reflects the inherent contradictions of a society which, with very little preparation, has had to manage the change from conditions of absolute governmental control to conditions of relative anarchy.

Keywords: Libya; media; Arab Spring; national transitional council; censorship; press; democratisation

Introduction

The propensity of any society to achieve a stable state of popular participation and governmental accountability – hallmarks of democracy and the rule of law – depends highly on the functioning of its mass media. Democracy, it has been argued, is based on a mutual understanding between the *demos* and the political system, and therefore relies on some form of media to make that communication work. Thus the role of media is dynamic, finely calibrated to each particular political context. In authoritarian states, ruling elites employ media as tools of propaganda or one-way communication with their citizens. Both content and access to public discourse are strictly controlled. In transitional countries and conflict zones, media can play a

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different role than in long-established democracies or dictatorships. In a society in transition, the search for identity and the ‘partisan’ ambition to foster change are essential motivations.

During the 2011 anti-Qadhafi Libyan uprisings, new Libyan journalists saw themselves as rebels armed with pens and microphones. Their coverage tended to be unashamedly biased – in favour of both rebel forces and the journalists’ political goals. Now, one year on, an emerging Libyan media is struggling to come to terms with the basic dichotomy between political commitment and a modern journalistic paradigm, which, at its most idealistic, prizes balance, objectivity and unbiased information. With the fall of Qadhafi and the progress of the transition, the Libyan media are self-consciously trying to become more ‘professional’ but they are also part of a ‘society in transition’ and they cannot reject or ignore the unique challenges and burdens that brings – such as the need to construct the means of political participation from scratch while fostering reconciliation and tolerance.

This article examines how the role and self-image of journalists and media producers in Libya have evolved during the different stages of the uprisings and the transition, as well as their impact on Libyan society. In addition, the struggle to reform state media institutions and the laws that govern them will be explored. Here, the Qadhafian legacy casts a long shadow and the issues involved in the struggle to shape the new media sector are iterations of a theme that prevails in all realms of post-Qadhafian political life: the struggle between the centre and the periphery for dominance.¹ To tease out the various forms of continuity in the Libyan media sector, a theoretical primer will be presented followed by a brief overview of the historical role of media under Qadhafi.

While acknowledging the significance of *Al-Jazeera* and various forms of social media as powerful facilitators of the Libyan uprisings, this article is focused on local broadcasting and print media. This decision is based on the observation that the impact of social media and transnational broadcasters has been fairly well documented,² while relatively little scholarly research has been conducted on post-Qadhafi media development inside the country. At the same time, the sudden emergence of a dynamic and open media scene in Libya, strongly focused on pressing domestic political issues, cannot help but gradually curtail the impact of other media – such as social and multinational – in the country. It must also have a significant impact on local and national politics. Therefore, it is unsurprising that the laws governing the media sphere constitute a domain of serious contention between state regulatory authorities and local media practitioners.

Mass media and democracy: not a static interrelationship

A participatory model of democracy would suggest that the core function of any media system should be the representation of citizens’ opinions and concerns, from the mainstream to the margins. Jürgen Habermas’ concept of deliberative democracy provides a theoretical framework for this ideal of a pluralistic public sphere. For Habermas, if access to the public discourse is unlimited and its culture is ‘rational’, then public discourse has the ability to frame and mould the political decision-making process (Norris and Obdugbemi 2010). Conversely, representatives of an ‘elitist model of democracy’ see the role of media as top-down and uni-directional. In this view, the mass media’s primary function is to provide communication opportunities for representatives of the political system to explain political decisions and their underlying considerations (Beierwaltes 2002). In the real world, the media simultaneously fulfils both the Habermasian and the ‘elite communication functions’ – the balance between them depends on the political context.

A third, and entirely separate, task of democratic media is commonly referred to as the 'watchdog' function – that is the continuous and critical monitoring of politics. In this role, journalists must systematically question the decisions and explanations issued by political actors and publicly investigate the processes by which political decisions are reached (Norris and Obdugbemi 2010). Fundamentally, mass media need to provide citizens with accurate and comprehensive information about politics and society, empowering them to vote and participate in public discourse. Without a multi-directional flow of information as encompassed in the three above-defined functions, democracy cannot operate.

The role of media in consolidated democracies is rather well defined. In a society undergoing a transition process, such as in Libya, the role of the media is more amorphous and frequently is itself a sphere of contestation. In such a society, the media is not part of upholding the prevailing freedoms of a system of governance but rather advocates for a process of transformation – usually one that involves a sharp break with the old order and the reinvention of the nation and the role of the press. Hafez (2005) has investigated the role of mass media as a catalyst of democratic change in the Arab world. According to his research, 'partisanship for democracy' and serving as 'agents for democratic reform' can be legitimate functions for media to play in a society undergoing a major transformation – despite the friction those roles inevitably entail with the common ideal of non-partisan media.

In Libya during the revolution, the media's partisanship was of high relevance for its advocacy function. Since the revolution, as Libyan society is now in a different 'stage' of its transition, new actors are engaged in a scramble to control the media and advocate for the changes or power structures they desire. At the current moment, one could argue that the government is attempting to institute a top-down elitist model of democracy while being opposed by entrepreneurial journalists and editors who are advocating for a Habermasian model of the media. Neither side has progressed far in the use of media in its non-partisan, watchdog function.

To gain a deeper understanding of media's impact during the revolution, we review the development of print and broadcasting media in Libya since the beginning of the uprisings in early 2011. In the course of this investigation we refer to the different theoretical aspects of media's role in a democracy as sketched above. To set the stage for this investigation, we will now briefly describe the media landscape under Qadhafi's rule.

Media under Qadhafi: tools for revolutionary mobilisation

Under Qadhafi, mass media was developed as a tool for revolutionary mobilisation. Correspondingly, the public perceived media as an extension of the regime's efforts to enlist the populace on its behalf. This dovetailed with the philosophy of the 'permanent revolution' outlined in Qadhafi's *Green Book*. In fact, the *Green Book's* express purpose was to mobilise the Libyan people to participate in Qadhafi's social experiment after the failure of the Arab Socialist Union party founded in 1971. Since his Zawara speech of 1973, Qadhafi's main political problem was one of mobilising Libya's 'masses' to counterbalance the opposition that Qadhafi faced from traditional elites and the *ulema* (El-Khawas 1986; Ayoub 1991).

In fact, after Qadhafi's rise to power in 1969, Libya's broadcast media gradually 'became the centrepiece of political and social mobilisation in the hands of Qadhafi' – firmly within a dictatorial application of an elitist model of the media (Richter). Qadhafi first used radio to announce his coup and later television was an essential tool that allowed him to win over the Libyan populace with his personal charisma. As his initial successes faded and his charismatic appeal started to be overshadowed by Libya's economic and political problems during the 1980s,

new uses for media were devised. In order to keep the Libyan people on his side and to safeguard his family's power, media organisations were frequently restructured. During this time, the state news agency Jamahiriyya News Agency adopted quasi-Stalinist strategies in its portrayal of Qadhafi – the Brother Leader beset by traitors and plagued by external enemies trying to halt his benevolent revolution.

However after 2000, the Libyan media underwent a limited, top-down liberalisation that allowed for marginally greater participation in the media sphere and limited questioning of political elites. Regional People's Committees were allowed to operate their own newspapers – this opened up a realm of partially open public communication at a local level. During this period, Qadhafi's son, Saif al-Islam, arrogated to himself the job of officially reforming the media. 'While this new "independent" press amounted to little more than a mini media empire, its importance was that it provided some space for Libyans to criticize the official mechanisms of the state' (Pargeter 2012). Saif al-Islam became popular among a certain stratum of young people, as both a strong critic of the authoritarian politics of his father and as the founder of promising media projects such as the satellite television station *Al-Libya*, the radio station *Al-Shababiyya*, and two newspapers *Oea* and *Quryna* (Pargeter 2012). These new media were part of Saif al-Islam's broader *Libya Al-Ghad* (The Libya of Tomorrow) programme announced in 2006, which sought to modernise Libyan society and to fight corruption and nepotism. When, towards the end of the decade, *Al-Libya* finally became a popular platform for critical debate and *Al-Ghad* started to have a serious impact, Saif's opponents – people like his brother Mu'tassim Billah, and hard line prime minister Baghdadi al-Mahmudi – quickly put an end to this more liberal episode. By 2010, all the *Al-Ghad* media projects were either closed down or incorporated into the Libyan Jamahiriya Broadcasting Corporation. By the time the Libyan uprisings began in February 2011, all media activities in Libya were controlled by Qadhafi himself or the hard line Revolutionary Committees Movement and those associated with them.

However, its lasting impact could not be fully undone. It had allowed self-professed reformers to exchange public letters about how Libya could be changed by constitutions, rule of law and the accountability of public officials. It had facilitated local protests by the families of the victims of the Abu Slim massacre. It had brought Fathi Terbel to prominence.³ In short, the Qadhafi regime indulged in a limited media opening alongside other forms of economic reform in an attempt to allow the population to 'let off steam' without changing its fundamental political structures. Despite the Qadhafi regime's ability to reverse its course and censor media, it was not truly in control of developments. Expectations for genuine change were nurtured and networks of like-minded intellectuals were created. These were of fundamental importance for both the trajectory of the 2011 uprisings and the creation of new media outlets in post-Qadhafi Libya (Pack 2013).

***Al-Ahrar* and *Al-Libya*: media at the frontline of the revolution**

The armed conflict between the rebels and Qadhafi loyalists lasted eight months from February to October. It was brought to a triumphant conclusion by the rebels' capture of Tripoli in August 2011 followed by the storming of Sirte and Bani Walid in October. In the media sphere, the phase of fighting was characterising by fierce antagonism between the state-run television station *Al-Libya* and the upstart revolutionary station *Al-Ahrar*. During the revolution, both television channels were used as tools to disseminate propaganda and mobilise the Libyan people.

Qadhafi's *Al-Libya* initially possessed hegemony over domestic Libyan TV, but as it had totally lost touch with Libyan public opinion its miscalculated media moves backfired. From

mid-February until he fled his private compound Bab al-Aziziyya with the fall of Tripoli, Qadhafi himself appeared on screen several times a day, denying the veracity of news about the revolution and denouncing the rebels and their allies as terrorists, cockroaches, spies and drug addicts. The great debacle of Qadhafi's media campaign was his son Saif al-Islam's bloodcurdling speech of 20 February. Many assumed Saif would promise new reforms attempting to play a mediating role between his father and the protesters. Instead he closed ranks with his family proclaiming the protesters to be Islamic radicals on drugs who needed to be eliminated. Rather than calming a small protest in Tripoli which had started the previous day, it launched thousands of youth onto the streets of the capital and the regime briefly lost control of most of the Western part of the country. In a similar vein was Qadhafi's speech of 22 February 2011. Filmed in front of Bab Al-Aziziyya, Qadhafi portrayed the protesters as insane, intoxicated agents of foreign forces and he called for the 'rats' to be hunted down mercilessly. Perplexed, BBC correspondent Frank Gardner wrote: 'Even by his own bizarre and eccentric standards, the latest speech by Colonel Qadhafi was breathtaking in its defiance of both the wider world and the reality now facing him' (*BBC*, February 22, 2011). Another surreal moment was Qadhafi's television appearance staged to dispel reports that he had fled to Venezuela. He appeared unshaven in a golf cart with a white umbrella. Like much of Qadhafi's media offensive it was miscalculated and backfired. As these events transpired before the founding of the rebel's TV station, they were unable to mount a unified public relations response. However, that may have initially played to their advantage – Qadhafian propaganda was so manifestly crude and ridiculous, it was instantaneous parodied throughout the world. It spawned not only mocking street art in Benghazi but also a viral You tube video where Qadhafi's 22 February genocidal threats to the Libyan people were 're-mixed' into a rap/techno song. Qadhafi's image was juxtaposed with mirror images of a scantily clad dancing girl – the video acquired over 4 million hits and became a rallying cry for the rebels despite being designed by the Israeli journalist and musician Noy Alooshi (*New York Times*, February 27, 2011).

As the Qadhafi family's own attempts to dissuade the Libyan people from rebellion failed they looked to their loyalists who might be savvier at public relations. *Al-Libya* anchorwoman Hala Misrati became a prominent figure in the media fight against the rebel movement. At the peak of revolutionary activity, she made a dramatic appearance on screen with a hand gun, stating she was ready to die defending Qadhafi. Misrati is also famous for the 'fatwa' she issued on air against the United Nations Security Council and its condemnation of Qadhafi's brutal response to the rebels. She was captured by rebels in late August 2011 and has been held in custody ever since (*CNN Arabic*, March 21, 2012).

Bizarrely, during the uprisings, members of the rebel movement were incarcerated in the premises of *Al-Libya* which turned the station into some kind of a 'media prison'. Misrati and her colleagues tried to force these jailed dissidents to deny the revolution on air and to call on the rebels to end the fighting. A case in point is that of Rana Akabani, a Syrian journalist who was abducted by Qadhafian forces and accused of spying for the rebels and foreign countries. When she was placed on *Al-Libya* to praise Qadhafi, she fearlessly took the chance and encouraged the rebel movement.

Amidst Qadhafi's media misfires, *Al-Ahrar* was founded by Mahmud Shammam on 30 March 2011 in Doha, Qatar, as the mouthpiece of the National Transitional Council (NTC) with the express aim to counter Qadhafian propaganda. The station's objective, according to Shammam, was to allow the young people at the forefront of the Libyan revolution to have a voice (Reporters Without Borders 2011, 69). Start-up funds for the project were provided by

Libyan business people abroad. Qatar-based television channel, *Al-Rayyan*, provided an office, studio space, technical equipment and other support.

Shammam, who was later appointed chairman of the NTC media commission and as such went on to assume responsibility for media policy in all of Libya, was well known as the editor of the Arabic edition of *Newsweek* and as a former board member of *Al-Jazeera* (Reporters Without Borders 2011, 54). The NTC's prime minister, Mahmoud Jibril, headed the station's executive committee.

From the beginning, *Al-Ahrar* worked to promote the revolution and the NTC (Wollenberg 2012b, 16). In effect, *Al-Ahrar* was not a 'journalistic project' in the traditional sense; it was intended as a platform for revolutionary propaganda. During the uprisings, the channel broadcasted images of fighters and rebels – along with a suitable soundtrack – in a bid to boost public morale and to encourage people to keep up the fight. Combat coverage and information about casualties and missing people were central to news broadcasts as was the promotion of key figures in the revolution, whether these were frontline fighters or political personnel. Qatari technical assistance and office space guaranteed that the Qatari role in the conflict was portrayed favourably.

The role of *Al-Jazeera* and social media

Since its foundation in 1996, *Al-Jazeera* has been praised for changing domestic journalism and public communication in the Arab world.⁴ During its first decade, it has frequently been criticised for taking sides, particular by political elites in the USA and the Arab world. It turned out that viewers had not seen anything yet. With the beginning of the uprisings against authoritarian regimes in the Arab world in Tunisia in December 2010, *Al-Jazeera* embarked on a whole new level of partisanship, openly campaigning for the revolutionaries. The channel replaced its regularly scheduled programming with live coverage of what was happening on the Arab streets, switching from one country to another. It had key revolutionary figures on its talk shows and interviewed rebels from the front lines. In effect, the first televised statement by bona fide rebels inside Libya was an interview with activist Idris al-Mismari broadcast by *Al-Jazeera* on 16 February 2011. Overwhelmed by the precursors to the Benghazi uprising, a breathless al-Mismari shouted into the phone while video footage of street protests were displayed on screen; the line went dead when he was arrested by security services (*Al-Jazeera*, February 16, 2011). Within seconds the Libyan rebel movement was pushed into the international spotlight; almost immediately, this accelerated and intensified events on the ground. On the very next day, 17 February, the uprisings spread throughout the eastern part of Libya and Benghazi was essentially liberated from regime control.

Ultimately *Al-Jazeera* devoted a massive amount of broadcasting time to amateur footage delivered by activists on the ground, which often showed violent action by regime forces against protestors. *Al-Jazeera* had gone from conducting journalism to simply broadcasting eye-witness accounts. This not only emphasised the channel's own pro-rebel stance but also redefined the role of citizen journalism in the larger sphere of Arab media. This new kind of openly partisan broadcasting served as encouragement to the rebels. During those tumultuous early months, *Al-Jazeera* was even closer to the Libyan street than the domestic rebel channel, *Al-Ahrar*. It was, as Khaled Hroub put it, a 'happy marriage between the wide screen TV and the small screen social media (and mainly camera-enabled mobile phones).' (Hroub 2011). The offspring of that marriage was the massive empowerment of the citizen journalist. 'Banned from their local media, arrested and mostly on the run, many activists and

spokespersons for leading revolutionaries used both wide and small screen as their platform to reach out to their people and mobilize them' (Hroub 2011).

This kind of continuous documentation of the fighting on the ground, as well as its immediate global dissemination, served as a warning to everyone involved: not a single attack, not a single action, would go unnoticed. Because any regime crackdown would potentially be seen by the whole world, social media began to provide – and in fact, still does provide – a form of protection to citizens. Even the North Atlantic Treaty Organization decision to 'intervene on humanitarian grounds' was influenced by this powerful new mechanism made up of the alliance of social media and pan-Arab channels. Which is why, one year later, *Al-Jazeera* has become a broadcasting role model [albeit a controversial one] for the emerging Libyan governmental news media, much as it has become in many other Arab countries.

Simultaneously, the importance of *Al-Jazeera* has faded in correlation with the rise in the number of new local non-governmental television stations. In autumn 2012, *Al-Jazeera* was competing with 23 local television stations, who, appealing directly to their viewers' interests, deal almost exclusively with Libyan issues. As a result, *Al-Jazeera* is no longer Libyans primary source of local news – and in fact its association with Qatar and certain other currents inside the rebel movement has gradually damaged its credibility.

The most famous protagonist of citizen journalism in Libya is the founder of the *Libya Al-Hurra* television station, Mohammed Nabbous, who was killed by Qadhafi regime forces on 19 March 2011 in Benghazi. Before launching a terrestrial TV station in Benghazi, he established a YouTube channel that covered the progress of the uprisings in all parts of eastern Libya. Nabbous was well known as a fearless reporter who constantly risked his life in order to deliver authentic footage of the revolution to an international audience. Today his name and face are icons of the revolution (Reporters Without Borders 2011, 9).

Freedom Group TV from Misrata is another example of amazingly powerful citizen journalism. It provided rebel fighters with satellite phones, as well as training on how to shoot and then deliver the resulting video footage. During the siege of Misrata, *Freedom Group TV* managed to circumvent the almost complete isolation of the city from the outside world and upload interviews, pictures and information from inside Misrata.

Online newspapers and websites published by Libyan dissidents abroad formed another important conduit for citizen journalism. These include *Akhbar Libya*, *Al-Manara Li-l-i'alam*, *Al-Watan Al-Libiyya*, *Libya al-Yawm* and *Libya Al-Mustaqbal*. A network of informal and formal correspondents from inside Libya sent photos, reports and video footage to these expatriate news outlets, creating a major source of information for transnational broadcasters and news agencies on events inside Libya. Anticipating the power of these opposition sites to convey stories of oppression and protests to the outside world, hackers – likely from the cybersecurity department of Libya's external security service or the Revolutionary Committees – attacked multiple opposition sites in January 2011 in the wake of the Tunisian revolution and the housing riots in various Libyan cities. The opposition websites content was replaced with pro-Qadhafi images and slogans, or taken offline altogether (*Al Jazeera* January 21, 2011). Site administrators switched to Facebook and other social media during the revolution until they could relaunch proper websites, finally rejoining the domestic media scene with the end of the Qadhafi regime's media censorship. *Al-Manara* even made the transition from an online diaspora newspaper, run out of the UK, to becoming an integral part of the local landscape with the launch of the *Al-Manara* print newspaper and *Al Manara FM* in Benghazi. Additionally, just as some of those involved in local media later became involved in politics or activism, Ashur Shamis, editor of *Akhbar Libya*, later became media advisor to the interim Libyan government.

Transforming revolutionary ideals into post-Qadhafi reality

The fall of the regime – first in Benghazi and then in Tripoli – precipitated a phase of radical openness and pluralism in the media landscape. A plethora of magazines and newspapers quickly sprang up. In July 2011, just five months into the revolution, observers counted approximately 120 newspapers and magazines. At least 10 new radio and television stations had begun broadcasting and an equally large number of new television channels were in the making.⁵ All of this new media had a lot in common: they were mostly initiated by young people – students and teenagers, among them many women – who built them up overnight without financial backing or any formal knowledge of the mechanics of journalism and the media business.

Impressively, the whole system was operating without any kind of financial compensation – nobody expected or received salaries; nobody expected or received any kind of profit. Donations covered the rental of office space and printing costs. This was because, with banks closed and any kind of official currency unavailable, money had become somewhat irrelevant – for the time being at least (Wollenberg 2012a, 9–12). Neighbours shared food and shelter, self-help groups provided basic services and local militias shared security responsibilities. Governmental control from the NTC was absent. Although conflicts between militias did occur and arms were ubiquitous, media offices in urban centres continued to run more or less smoothly. In this first hour of change, the primary motivation of the young media producers was not to support particular factions or militias in local turf wars but to continue transforming the revolution into a national success story. Against all odds, Libya did not collapse into chaos. The cooperative spirit fostered by this unique moment in the country's history was reflected in and fostered by the new media.

The collective self-image of Libyan journalists, as conveyed in interviews and presentations, was that of a rebel with a pen, a camera and a microphone.⁶ The journalists were all part of the revolutionary movement and had been using their media to give real meaning to the protests and the fighting. In sharp contrast to *Al-Ahrar*, these were truly grassroots projects. Moreover, their mission was not about winning a fight but about transforming their revolutionary ideals into reality (Wollenberg 2012a, 9–12).

For many of these media pioneers, the representation of Libya's diversity was a central goal. Minority groups, cultures, regions and marginalised opinions were embraced and brought to public awareness with the express aim of fostering reconciliation and tolerance. Part of this approach was to enable ordinary citizens to actually participate in public discourse. Post-Qadhafi media programmes happily included citizens as guests and speakers – something Libyan radio stations, in particular, championed. Media projects rejected the very exclusive top-down models of the past 42 years and instead moved towards a more participatory concept, one that not only involved members of the public from every conceivable stratum of Libyan life but that also facilitated critical discussion and tolerated alternative arguments and viewpoints.⁷

One example of this trend towards inclusion was *Radio Shabab*, a station founded by young students in Benghazi in late April 2011. Their avowed mission was to educate the youth about their role in a democratic society. As the station's executive director, Mohammed Abu Janah, explained 'we were so oppressed in the past, but now we can do and say what we want. That is something young Libyans have to learn'.⁸ Once the station was established, word spread fast and more people became involved, bringing food or music to an improvised studio in a former classroom with a makeshift sound booth, some tables and a computer. The station's most successful programme was a talk show called *Libya Café*, which simulated the informal

atmosphere of a coffee shop, where guests could talk freely and openly about politics and society, the revolution and Libya's future.

Another example is the newspaper *Sawt* (Voice) which was based solely on the idea of reader participation and edited by Mohammed Shembish (Norris and Obdugbemi 2010). During the early days of the revolution in February 2011, the government shut down all Internet and postal services. In response, the *Sawt* team put a mailbox in Freedom Square in downtown Benghazi so that people could submit articles, ideas and even personal anecdotes. 'We wanted people to realize that they could express whatever they wanted, including political opinion. [...] We published the different political views that are submitted to us. That is our way of practicing democracy.' (Norris and Obdugbemi 2010) Shembish's approach was a direct representation of Habermasian ideals of media as an unrestricted space where ideas flow from the people upwards towards decision-makers while simultaneously creating a popular discourse grounded in reason.

The Libyan, a glossy magazine first published in Benghazi in May 2011, seeks to foster the renaissance of diverse cultural and political identities in the country. 'Most Libyans don't know anything about Libya, about the other cities, about the other Libyans in other regions. . . ' said editor-in-chief and founder, Ibrahim Shebani. 'We write stories about Libyans. To show us who we are.' At *The Libyan*, diversity was linked to giving proportional representation to each of Libya's regions – a tendency that deepened in the course of the political process. Similar to *Radio Shabab*, Shebani is trying to help facilitate the transition to democracy by educating his readers about the social challenges they would eventually be facing, due to political change.

Ethnic communities in Libya also launched media of their own after the fall of the regime. The Amazigh (Berbers) of Jabal Nafusa have several publications in Tamazight, such as the *Yefren Times* and *Tagrmas*. For the Amazigh, their own media is about public recognition and the re-establishment of their culture and language. 'Before, we were in darkness, we were invisible,' says Wasim al-Idrissi, editor-in-chief of *Tagrmas*. 'Now we are visible again. This is the new Libya.'⁹ The newspaper's main function is to revive the culture, language and identity of the Berber community. In fact, comparatively speaking, its significance as a source of information is minor since less than 5% of Berbers are actually literate in any form of Tamazight. In this way the public and social use of newspapers and literary societies among today's Amazigh is reminiscent of the use of the newly written Slavic languages in the nationalist movements of late nineteenth century Eastern Europe and is in fitting with Anderson's (1991) understanding of the importance of print media in the formation of a national imaginary. Both minorities and non-minority journalists were using the new media to advocate for tolerance and national reconciliation. They saw it as a non-governmental tool to heal the divisions of 42 years of Qadhafi's rule.

In a related development, the attitude of most media producers has a strong educational tendency. After decades of tyranny, where any divergent political views were suppressed, media producers recognise that the capacity for political participation needs to be reawakened in society. They see media outlets as laboratories in which people can learn how to function as citizens of the new Libya by expressing themselves and their opinions, by overcoming their own fears and by accepting the opinions of others. In other words, many in the Libyan media see their mission as capacity building at the level of each individual with the goal of creating citizens of a democracy. This conceptualisation is close to Jürgen Habermas' ideal of citizen empowerment by participation in public discourse. It can also be linked to what Kai Hafez describes as media's 'agency for democratic reform' in societies where parties are either weak or not yet established. Hafez (2005) claims, 'It can integrate, aggregate and articulate the political will

of the people; it can mobilise people for non-parliamentarian political action.’ In contrast to the common journalistic ideal of objectivity, here ‘partisanship in the service of democracy’ is seen as a legitimate function of local media, and a natural part of the process of political transformation. Many of the media producers working in Libya today struggle with these contradictory roles, as they evolve from revolutionary broadcasting into a more ‘information-driven’ model of journalism.

Unsurprisingly, many of the media advocates for democracy vehemently deny their partisanship. While some are moving towards professional journalism, others have simply ceased to exist. But, as Hafez rightly remarks, ‘[a]t this point, conflicts are inherent between the role of the media as “political parties for democracy” and as “informers”.’ (Hafez 2005)

Besides providing information, one of the core functions of the media in a democracy is the ‘watchdog’ function. Yet in the first year of post-Qadhafi Libya, local journalists were, on the whole, reluctant to criticise the NTC or to tackle sensitive issues such as illegal detentions, revenge killings and the undisciplined behaviour of rebel militias. Investigative journalism or the monitoring of the actions of the political elites, are not considered the primary role of the media in revolutionary Libya. This attitude was obviously linked to their self-image: the media was a ‘revolutionary project’ united in solidarity behind the transformations of the revolution, as well as the protagonists that had brought it. The reluctance to criticise those protagonists even in an encouraging way clearly derives from the widespread perception that the revolution could easily fall under attack. The NTC and the militias are prominent representatives of the new era and as such they were held sacrosanct – at least for a certain amount of time.¹⁰

Then in the spring of 2012, just as Libyan journalists were slowly starting to reconsider this attitude, the NTC passed a law prohibiting any criticism of the 17 February 2011 revolution as well as any state institutions or the judiciary (see more detailed discussion of Law No. 37 below). The law was eventually revoked by the Supreme Court but the incident indicates that, despite its best intentions, the legacy of the Qadhafi era still has a pervasive impact on the relationship between the Libyan government and the media.

State media after the fall of the regime and the Ministry of Culture

Immediately after the fall of Tripoli on 20 August 2012, Qadhafi’s propaganda channel *Al-Libya* was taken over by the same rebels who had been running the revolutionary radio and television station *Al-Hurra* in Benghazi. When *Al-Libya*’s management team was replaced, the Libyan Jamahiriyyah General Broadcasting Corporation was reorganised as *Libyan Radio and Television (LRT)*. The operating staff, including presenters, technicians and editors, remained. Two weeks later, broadcasts resumed, albeit at a low level consisting of only a few hours a day and based on pre-recorded content, none of which included news. Politically, the newly founded *LRT* celebrated the fall of Qadhafi and the emergence of a new and free Libya. Like many journalists and former Qadhafi loyalists, the station had simply switched sides from one day to the next. Perhaps this should not be surprising, but what happened next certainly was. *LRT* staff, most of whom had been working there during Qadhafi’s time as opposed to the new management, began to feel that their bosses were discriminating against them. It appeared that the new managers had implemented a top-down communication system that did not allow for employee participation in decision-making processes. This policy was due, in part, to the rebels’ antipathy towards the former Qadhafi loyalists in the studios.

Outraged by this authoritarian behaviour, staff members wrote a letter of complaint to the NTC. Surprisingly this letter was acknowledged and, even more surprisingly, it led to the

dismissal of then *LRT* director, Saleh Majtoub. Consequently, the *LRT* was managed by a consortium of staff representatives. This happened against a back drop of growing tension between the various militias in Tripoli and a dying down of the euphoria about the success of the revolution. For the first time, the NTC's ineffective communication strategies began to be criticised. This prompted a reassessment of the *LRT* situation. In mid-December 2011, the interim government and the NTC created *Libya* as *LRT*'s new flagship for post-Qadhafi state television. The channel was run by former media adviser and now director, Mohammed Talib, and his deputy, Hadi al-Ghariani, who simultaneously advised the office of the prime minister Abdurrahim Al-Kib in media strategies. Ghariani also coordinated with the Ministry of Culture, which had assumed responsibility for all media.¹¹

As the principal liaison between the *LRT* and the government, al-Ghariani clearly envisaged the channel as a platform for government communication, 'For this transitional period the interim government will present its policies on the new channel and it will [use it to] communicate with the Libyan people.' He went on to state,

[*Libya*] was created simply because we needed a television station immediately, in order to connect with the Libyan people quickly. . . . There is an interim government and nobody knows who they are. . . . And the Libyan people are anxious. *Libya* is going to diffuse this tension by explaining the facts. Basically we're in an emergency situation and this television channel is like the fire service.¹²

Notably, the station's mission was reduced to a simple task: to act as the mouthpiece for the new government and to explain its policies to the public. Basically, what he describes is a one-way communication method following an elitist model. Advocates of the NTC's use of mass media would identify the media's role as providing politicians with an opportunity to explain political decisions, the reasons behind them and the political process more broadly (Beierwaltes 2002). Conversely, advocates of a more participatory model of democracy would argue that a public service broadcaster needs to provide the arena for debate among citizens from all streams of society. Analogous to this difference between a participatory and an elitist approach, there is an apparent division of labour in the new Libya between the media outlets: the private, grass-roots media emphasised participation, diversity and debate, while the state broadcaster remained a platform for the government to communicate with the people. Neither side arrogated to itself the 'watchdog' function.

In parallel to the transformation of the state broadcaster, the ministry of information was abolished, a move welcomed by Libyan journalists and media producers. The NTC then appointed a media commission to discuss a new media policy. Its chairman, Mahmud Shammam, was also director of the television channel *Al-Ahrar*.

The commission's overriding mandates were to develop a regulatory framework for media development and, simultaneously, to protect the public sphere from the media moguls and political interest groups already trying to monopolise parts of the media spectrum at this early stage. Then in late 2011, the authority of the media commission was revoked and media affairs were placed under the supervision of the Ministry of Culture. Among Libyan journalists, this move has been perceived as an attempt to strengthen government control over the media sector (Wollenberg 2012a, 9–12). It also reveals a somewhat distorted perception of the role of media in the new Libya as the Ministry of Culture is concerned primarily with disseminating positive images of Libya and Libyans and educating the populace in the ways of democracy. Investigative reporting or criticism of governmental politics was never part of its mandate.

The question of media governance and regulation was contentiously discussed in the NTC. Amongst the advocates of an independent media commission was Abdul-Hafiz Ghuqa, one of

the organisers of the first protests in Benghazi, vice-chairman under NTC chairman Mustafa Jalil, official spokesperson of the NTC and the head of the NTC's communication committee. He had been among those initiating the 'Good Offices' Conference at Northwestern University's Doha campus in early December 2011 which was arranged in order to draft a basic media strategy and develop an independent Media Commission.¹³ prime minister Al-Kib, however, favoured the media falling within the Ministry for Culture's jurisdiction and eventually implemented this preference. During this interim, the Ministry for Culture, assumed responsibility only temporarily and accordingly undertook no steps towards the drafting of a media policy while the NTC was still in power. Any final decision on this issue was left up to the next Minister for Culture that would be part of the new cabinet formed after the transfer of power from the NTC to the General National Congress (GNC). In practical terms, this has meant that the months long delay from the election of the GNC in August 2012 until the swearing-in of Ali Zidan's government on 15 November passed with the issue in a deep freeze. However, after the Zidan cabinet was sworn in the GNC quickly dismissed the idea of an independent media authority that would operate beyond state control and voted for the creation of an information ministry to be in charge for media development and regulation (see below).

The various approaches to media jurisdiction espoused by different actors obviously represent various degrees of state intervention. They reflect the inherent contradictions of a society which, with very little preparation, has had to manage the change from conditions of absolute governmental control to conditions of relative anarchy.

Market pressures, consolidation, and the Libyan phenomenon of local media

Libya was internationally praised for conducting the 7 July 2012 elections in an organised and peaceful manner. Indeed, Libyans surprised the whole world by preparing, organising and conducting free and fair elections efficiently and quickly, as well as by electing nominally 'liberal' parties over their Islamist rivals. This outcome also bolstered press freedom and media development.

With an elected, democratic government – albeit a weak one – taking shape in post-Qadhafi Libya, the media landscape is entering the next stage of maturity. Libyan media – every newspaper, every broadcaster – are shaping their future identity on a daily basis and establishing a uniquely Libyan way forward. At the same time, new players are entering the scene and challenging current patterns of media practice. Many media outlets have been forced out of business; others voluntarily decided to stop producing.

While the closure of any newspaper is generally deplorable, this should not necessarily be regarded as a sign of a decrease in press freedom in Libya, or as a setback in the integrity of the public sphere. Although larger than Egypt in land area, Libya is home to less than seven million people. Accordingly, despite the high levels of per capita GDP and literacy in Libya, the market for news media remains relatively small and many media outlets struggle to recover their production costs. Rather than a dramatic step backwards, the decrease in the number of media outlets can be seen as an early indicator of the normalisation/rationalisation of the Libyan media sector. It is about the media's adjustment to market pressures and the actual size of its audience after its explosive and non-economical growth during the uprisings.

One year after the fall of the regime one can purchase 25 different newspapers on an average newsstand in Tripoli. Besides state-run newspapers like *Bilad* and *February* or the handful of papers representing political interest groups and parties, some truly independent newspapers of decent journalistic quality are available. *Libya Al-Jadida* in Tripoli is part of this group

with a circulation of 7500 as well as *Al-Kalima* and *Birniq* from Benghazi. The number, quality and circulation of independent newspapers are important indicators for the integrity and health of the media landscape at large. It indicates the actual potential for journalistic freedom in the critiquing of political elites and the avoidance of a monopolistic situation.

In addition to the main newspapers available in the capital Tripoli, and in urban centres like Misrata and Benghazi, there is an abundance of private local and community-based newspapers produced and disseminated in all parts of Libya; these target small, specific audiences and revolve around local or community issues.¹⁴ Local councils in Bani Walid, Ras Al-Hilal, Nalut, Jadu and many other cities are also running their own publications. There are specialist publications for children, the disabled, architects, women, families and specific neighbourhoods. Likewise, a plethora of community radio stations operate all over the country – the Legatum Institut counted around 200 radio stations and 200 newspapers in July 2012, while the Public Press Corporation has reported about double that number – around 450 – including bulletins, weeklies and monthlies (*Al-Jazeera*, May 20, 2012). This high number of independent media initiatives targeting small and specific audiences reflects the fact that the revolution was started and accomplished by many disparate but highly cohesive local movements, and it reflects an increasing empowerment of Libyan communities – be they organised along ethnic, tribal, regional or interest-based lines. To reiterate, the role of local media in strengthening local solidarities is unsurprising given the fact that the political change in Libya came about as the consequence of a series of separate anti-Qadhafi uprisings lacking a unified command and control structure each of which needed to generate its own media infrastructure to succeed in its revolutionary mission. Therefore, the local media landscape reflects the path-dependency of the Libyan revolution and further reinforces the ‘dominance of the local dimension’ of Libyan loyalties over national ones.¹⁵ Community media outlets reflect the sense of unity within the local groups they service as well as strengthening it. They function as a force multiplier for their communities, facilitating the empowerment of that community on the national stage. They provide platforms for debate and information-sharing for specific target groups, allowing them to organise and coordinate their actions.

Libya’s new media diversity

Among the English language publications, the website *Libya-Herald.com*, stands out, for its comprehensive coverage of the politics of post-Qadhafi Libya. Founded in February 2012 by Michel Cousins, a Briton who grew up in Libya in the 1960s, the website attracted an astounding 15,000 readers daily and 100,000 page hits as of the summer of 2012.¹⁶ Most articles are written by foreign staff and information is delivered by Libyan stringers from all parts of the country. As a result, the *Libya Herald* has established itself as the go-to source for late-breaking developments in Libya’s legal, constitutional and security spheres. Its editorials, especially those by Sami Zaptia and George Grant, are pitched at an educated and informed audience who wish to obtain an optimistic yet factually grounded look at Libya. The first print issue appeared as a special business supplement in November 2012 (*Libya Herald*, November 26, 2012). Its main competitor is the English language *Tripoli Post*, which is a holdover from the Qadhafi era and hence its journalistic standards are questioned by some. Nonetheless, it remains committed to highlighting the salient features of Libya’s political life to the outside world. It combines a website with a weekly printed issue.

The high number of newspapers and distinct pluralism in perspective among them is quite an achievement for a country undergoing the scope of transformation that Libya is. However, after

four decades of a severely restricted press under Qadhafi, most Libyans do not have much interest in newspapers. 'We have to change the culture of reading, especially for young people. They never experienced a culture of discussion or opinion making. They never read', says Faisal Swehli, co-publisher of *Libya Al-Jadida*.¹⁷ Still it seems likely that circulation will remain low for a number of years. The majority of newspapers do not print more than 2000-3000 copies. Advertising sales, which provide much needed income for newspapers, were boosted by the elections for a short period of time. After the elections, the government remains either the biggest, or the sole, advertising client for most Libyan newspapers. If the security situation continues to improve and foreign companies return to do business in Libya this situation may change dramatically. Conversely, if international perception of the Libyan security environment remains poor, particularly in the wake of the attack on the American mission, then the situation is unlikely to change.

Distribution is another problem. Because there are currently no logistics service providers or home delivery services, the publishers themselves have to build up the required infrastructure to get newspapers into homes or newsstands.

Additionally, despite the best intentions, the quality of Libyan journalism remains of some concern when judged according to international standards. Libyan newspapers are still far from competing with their counterparts in Egypt and Tunisia.

In the television sector, a diverse set of competitors come from very different backgrounds. There are currently 23 Libyan TV stations, which is a comparably high number given the population of Libya. One of the most popular stations is still *Al-Ahrar*, the former mouthpiece of the revolution which is now in the process of becoming the voice of the nation's 'liberal' forces – that is, the National Forces Alliance and associated movements.

There is also the private television station *Al'-Asima*, recognized by Libyans for its decent political coverage and a comprehensive range of political talk shows. It was founded in spring 2011 in Tunis by Nabil Shebani and Juma al-Usta, former head of the General Union of Chambers of Commerce and Industry under Qadhafi. As such it retains a pro-business slant. It also gained popularity for its courageous coverage and criticism of the demolition of the Sha'ab mosque in Tripoli and attacks on other Sufi sites in Libya by ultra-conservative Salafists.¹⁸ More generally, *Al-Asima* is known for openly tackling the problem of Islamist militias in Libya on talk shows and in its news segments.

The station, *Libya Al-Hurra*, in Benghazi was founded by media hero and revolutionary icon, Mohammed Nabous (mentioned above). *Central Libya TV*, an off-shoot of the former *Misrata FM*. It started broadcasting in the summer of 2012, with aspirations of becoming the new state television station. Also located in Misrata are the satellite channels, *Tubakts TV* and *Tubakts FM*.

The political affiliations of media outlets are a contested topic among journalists. Allegations and rumours that this or that TV-station is being controlled by the Muslim Brotherhood, by former Qadhafi supporters, or by both, are ubiquitous. Apparently, plenty of the individuals who worked with Saif Al-Islam on the *Al-Ghad* project still work in the Libyan media today. Some have founded media, some are editors or producers. A number of journalists with the *Quryna* newspaper under the *Al-Ghad* group have become part of *Quryna's* new incarnation, *Quryna Al-Jadida* (April 8, 2012). These processes are in fitting with developments in the country's economic and political life in which reformist technocrats under Qadhafi now occupy top positions in the new Libya. Predictably, this is because technocrats with highly specific skills and relevant experience exist primarily among the majority of Libyans who worked in some capacity with the former regime. Conversely, members of the Muslim Brotherhood are also well represented in the media all over the country. No one disputes that both of these forces are

having a powerful impact on media development in Libya today. Still, the hasty classification of media outlets solely according to these affiliations is inaccurate and fuels a culture of mistrust and mutual denigration.

Unsurprisingly, there is no reliable data on Libya's media consumption to date. However, conversations with Libyan journalists suggest that, currently, the state-run television stations *Libya One*, *Libya Al-Wataniya* and *Libya* are almost irrelevant in terms of reach and significance. Their programmes come mostly from archives; what entertainment they do provide is bleak and the standard of journalism is poor.

State-run television has simply not yet managed to adapt to Libya's post-Qadhafi reality. Instead, it has undertaken a series of management changes – without reinventing itself and without clarifying its mandate or its relationship to the government. Also, the urgent need for a reduction in staff has not yet been addressed. The state broadcaster *Al Wataniya* alone has more than 5000 employees, of which only a fraction seem to have enough work to do. The inefficiency inherent in these kinds of staffing conditions on the one hand and the injustice in possible mass layoffs on the other both need to be tackled.

That the staff of all of the state-run stations went on strike in late spring of 2012 was indicative of this malaise. Furthermore, armed brigades that were assigned to protect the state's stations started to occupy the studios and sell the equipment.¹⁹ Mohammed Talib, newly appointed director of *Libya* and a member of the Muslim Brotherhood, found himself in an on-going conflict with his employees and finally had to leave the station.²⁰ As of summer 2012, it seems as though the condition of Libya's state broadcasting system is fairly hopeless. And it is likely to remain so until it is reformed from the ground up.

The actual power of television in Libya was demonstrated by the TV channel *Libya Al-Hurra* when it made a spectacular appeal for disarmament to which thousands of private weapon owners and militiamen in Tripoli and Benghazi responded. On 29 September in Martyr Square in Tripoli and in Tahrir Square in Benghazi, large numbers of grenades, machine guns, bazookas and other weaponry were handed over to the army by their private owners – framed by marching music and the applause of the spectators. The name of each donor as well as the type of weapon was announced over loud speakers (*Libya Herald*, September 30, 2012). However, this was a one-off event and sustained follow up from the government has been lacking.

The handover of armaments was organised by the security forces in coordination with *Libya Al-Hurra* and was intended as a celebration of peace, discipline, solidarity and prudence. The success and enormous symbolic power of these two ceremonies taking place in two centres of revolutionary action indicated not only the extensive reach of the channel but also the people's strong attachment to it.

Post-election trends in media regulation

After the 7 July 2012 GNC election, developments in the field of media regulation and legislation have been highly fluid. In May 2012, the NTC passed Law No. 37, which prohibits the glorification of Muammar Qadhafi or his sons as well as any criticism of the 17 February 2011 revolution in times of war. In addition, anyone who 'insults Islam, or the prestige of the state or its institutions or judiciary, and every person who publicly insults the Libyan people, slogan or flag', or does anything else to 'harm the 17 February revolution', could be jailed. Moreover, the law defines Libya as currently being in a state of war.

Law No. 37 caused a storm of outrage among international and local advocacy organisations and eventually, it was abolished by the Libyan Supreme Court in early July. In fact, it partially

resembles the infamous emergency laws that facilitated state repression in Tunisia and Egypt under Ben Ali and Mubarak – against which the Arab Spring movements were waged.

Despite the abolition of the law, this incident has impacted the way journalists now approach these topics, particularly because the NTC did not react to the Supreme Court's decision. According to Sarah Leah Whitson from Human Rights Watch the law seems, 'a cut and paste job with the Qadhafi-era laws! The law violates Libya's Provisional Constitutional Covenant and international human rights law' (Hammouda, 2012).

Shortly before elections for the GNC, the NTC enacted some further laws on media regulation – although apparently without consulting any members of media or civil society. These were order No. 44 (2012) for the creation of a Supreme Media Authority, order No. 43 (2012) for the creation of a National Press Organisation and order No. 36 (2012) for the creation of a Broadcasting and Television Organisation (Elshhati 2012). The fact that journalists were excluded from the consultation process led to protests from the media establishment against the new laws and their hasty implementation. Their announcement on 28 May was followed by a week of protests in front of the NTC headquarters (*Libya Herald*, May 26, 2012).

Meanwhile with the support of NTC chairman Mustafa Abdul-Jalil and in accordance with order No. 44, members of a media commission were appointed in Tripoli to assume responsibility for organising Libya's media sector, to ensure its 'freedom and independence' and to protect 'national unity and peace'. The newly established commission would be overseen by the government.

At about the same time, some well-known Libyan media figures called for the creation of a (non-governmental) media commission that was elected by Libyan journalists, which would be in charge of media regulation as well as the drafting of a legislative framework. This plan was an attempt to start a bottom-up process that would counter the top-down approach being advocated by the NTC.

In June 2012, more than 500 journalists gathered for three days in Jadu, a small Amazigh town in the Nafusa Mountains, to elect a High Commission for Media. In only 48 hours representatives from the south, east and west had hammered out a deal about how to balance votes from Libya's three historic regions and also reached an agreement on each region's number of delegates.²¹ After this, the commission was elected. Notably journalists from Misrata felt marginalised during this process and in fact, they left the meeting in protest complaining about 'too many Qadhafi people at the conference'. They even accused the conference's organiser Suliman Dogha of insulting them.

Despite all of this, the media commission came into being. Although it did not instigate its formation, the NTC endorsed the commission's existence and verified its mandate to draft media regulation and legislation in law No. 62.²² This was on the one hand considered a further step toward press freedom and the formation of an independent media.²³ At the same time though, the parallel existence of two media commissions in September 2012 indicates a certain lack of coordination on all sides. Among journalists and media professionals the two commissions are referred to as the 'Rixos commission' (established in the Rixos Hotel in Tripoli whose members were appointed), and the 'Jadu commission' (elected at the spontaneous conference in the town of Jadu in the Nafusa mountains) with both claiming legitimacy.

On 26 November 2012, only three weeks after the prime minister Ali Zidan took office, the GNC put a preliminary end to any confusion regarding media jurisdiction by voting for the creation of a Ministry of Information and by dissolving all existing media commissions. This was a clear move towards state control of media that immediately sparked controversy among journalists and media producers: some embraced the idea of increased control in order to prevent the further spread of rumours and deliberate misinformation that they felt had been fostering

feelings of insecurity and inter-communal animosity in Libyan society. Others feared that press freedoms would be eviscerated. Some feared that the freedoms the revolution had obtained would go to waste as the state increased its grip over civil society and the media. However, it should be noted that prime minister Zidan has not appointed a Minister of Information (*Libya Herald*, November 26, 2012).

In the first week of December 2012, a three-day media conference was organised for journalists to debate the matter of the Ministry, among other issues. For many, the new Ministry not only represented increased state control but also the fear that Tripoli was once again the hub of an oppressive state power – this was especially important to journalists from Benghazi and Eastern Libya in general (*Quryan al-Jadida*, December 6, 2012). In short, just as the very nature of the 2011 uprisings have led to a vibrant local media which strengthens local identities, so too has the tension between centre and periphery which characterised the struggle for power in post-Qadhafi Libya clearly manifested itself in the media sector (Pack, 2013).

For newspaper publishers in Libya the Public Press Corporation (formerly Committee to Support the Press) will continue to be important in mediating the role of government in the media sector. Founded by the NTC in September 2011, it is tasked with the support of print media in Libya and the publication of publicly funded newspapers like *Bilad* and *February*. In addition to this, the corporation is responsible for placing journalistic employees, the relaying of government notices and campaigns to Libyan newspapers. As the governmental media planning agency, the corporation has become a crucial source of financing for newspapers (although 50% of the public budget for distribution of notices remains with the agency). In addition, the committee runs printing facilities, which a number of select newspapers can use free of charge. It also runs a training facility for journalists.²⁴

Although the corporation was officially founded in September 2011, it is actually derived from a corporate body which emerged from the former ‘General Press Authority’ that used to be in charge of the administration and control of Libyan newspapers. At the time of writing, the director of the committee is Idris al-Mismari (mentioned above) – one of the protagonists of the revolution and a political prisoner under Qadhafi. As in many other public facilities, in this case a team of at least 1200 employees was transferred from the old agency to the new, while the management was replaced.²⁵ Tensions between the new management and the old employees – resulting from the sudden changes in management – is an almost unavoidable problem and one which persists in other Libyan public offices as well as in other countries experiencing similar transitions. It seems that cooperation is more easily adopted at newly founded organisations where the lines between old and new employees, between active revolutionaries and passive observers of the revolution are not drawn vertically, but criss-cross the whole structure.

Conclusion

The dissolution of the NTC and the handover of power to the new government selected by the GNC should augur further sophistication and refinement for journalism in Libya as budding journalists continue to learn investigative reporting. It is only natural to expect that – building on the principals of the 17 February revolution and the GNC’s accountability to its constituents – journalists gradually will enhance their ability to monitor political elites and that media will increasingly fulfil the ‘watchdog’ function of the press and hold their elected officials accountable. Even more likely is that the people will use the media to shape the political discourse surrounding the writing of Libya’s new constitution. However, as the media attempts to play

these essential roles for a functioning democracy, much will continue to depend on how the problem of arms and the armed conflict in Libya are resolved, because press freedom will always be held hostage to the overall security situation in the country.

Furthermore, the Libyan body politic is struggling – in the wake of the attack on the US Ambassador Christopher Stevens on 11 September 2012 by fringe Islamist groups and the siege of Bani Walid in late October waged by pro-government militias against (ex)Qadhafi-loyalists – to determine the extent to which freedom of speech is to be allowed for enemies of the Libyan state. As of December 2012, the fact that Libya's democratic transition has, thus far, unfolded so rapidly and been forwarded by such a diverse array of proponents, can only inspire a sense of optimism about the future of communication in Libya's public sphere. The road ahead will be bumpy, and governmental and societal forces are likely to combine with the security situation to constrain the emergence of independent journalism in Libya. Certain key pieces of legislation like the creation of the Ministry of Information and the dissolving of all existing media commissions appear to augur increasing centralisation and the curtailing of press freedoms in the new Libya, yet the swift and forceful counter reaction on behalf of independent media outlets against the threat of censorship or state monopoly demonstrates the vibrancy of the Libyan media sector. It is far too early to pronounce media's subjugation to the state in Libya as the media sphere has shown enormous dynamism during the uprisings and has impressed all observers with its ability to adapt and struggle for its freedom.

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Notes

1. This article tangentially draws upon from the thematic approach of Pack (2013). That work looks at the Libyan revolution through a series of lenses: civic organization, continuities in Libyan history, economics, the role of outside actors, tribes, ethnic minorities and Islamists. This article builds on the books structural framework by investigating the uprisings through the novel lens of media. For a detailed explanation of the centre-periphery dichotomy as a means for analysing politics in the new Libya, consult Pack and Barfi, February 2012, and the Introduction of the aforementioned forthcoming book.
2. For more information on the role of social media in the Arab Spring, see Lim (2012), Howard and Parks (2012) and Lamer (2012). The role of *Al-Jazeera* is covered in Hijjawi (2011) and more information on the role of transnational broadcasters and other media can be found in Gala and Spielhaus (2012).
3. Terbel achieved prominence inside Libya from 2006 onwards for representing some of the families of the victims of the Abu Slim massacre in their lawsuits for compensation from the regime as well as conducting a weekly protest in front of the Benghazi courthouse. He achieved international prominence when an uprising broke out after his arrest on 15 February 2011 provided the key first spark of the 17 February revolution.
4. It has even been understood as changing the global power balance between the West and the Arabs, as well as power relations between the various countries in the Arabian peninsula. Miles (2006).
5. *17 February Revolution: Media in north-eastern Libya* (International Media Support, Summer 2011), <http://i-m-s.dk/files/publications/1803%20Libya.final.web0.pdf> (Accessed July 27, 2012).
6. Our elaborations regarding self-image of Libyan journalists are based on interviews with Libyan journalists conducted by Mirco Keilberth on behalf with of MICT.
7. This kind of conceptualization is close to Jürgen Habermas' ideal of a pluralistic public sphere that is made of citizens' opinions and concerns, from the mainstream to the margins, whether majority or minority voices. Habermas is suggesting, that the representation of this diversity is the core function of any media system and

- that the public discourse is supposed to lead the political decision-making process. See also Norris and Obdug-bemi (2010, 3–27).
8. Interview with Mohammed Abu Janah by Mirco Keilberth on behalf of primary author in Benghazi, July 2011.
 9. Interview with Wasim Al Idrissi by Mirco Keilberth on behalf of primary author in July 2011.
 10. For discussions of the dual role of the *thuwwar* as both liberators and as potential hijackers of the revolution in Pack and Barfi (2012, 6) For example, 'In the Libyan domestic discourse on the revolution, the individual freedom fighter (*tha'ir*, plural *thuwwar*) who abandoned his previous livelihood and left his home to risk his life fighting Qadhafi is the superman of the uprisings. ... in many ways, the country's discourse maintains that an individual *tha'ir* can do no wrong in pushing for his rights or making demands on the state, no matter how arbitrary those demands may be. At the same time, however, a *tha'ir* who remains involved with a militia or similar body risks tarnishing his image'.
 11. *Reinventing the public sphere in Libya*. p. 32.
 12. Interview with Hadi Al Ghariani by Mirco Keilberth on behalf of primary author in Tripoli, December 2011.
 13. For more information see conference website <http://mediavisionlibya.northwestern.edu/good-offices>
 14. For a fairly exhaustive list of radio and print media in the new Libya, the Legatum Institute's Libya Media Wiki, available at <http://libyamediawiki.com>, is the most easily accessible and up-to-date source. More than just a catalogue or listing it examines each media outlet in terms of its circulation, funding structure, reach, connection to the government or other political movements, as well as telling the story of its foundation. In fact, for readers wishing to find out more details concerning the phenomenon of media in Libya than can be conveyed in an analytical social science article such as this one, we strongly suggest consulting the Wiki.
 15. The periphery (or localities) are understood as possessing revolutionary legitimacy while the centre (or government) is frequently questioned as being comprised of holdovers from the Qadhafi era who lack legitimacy. This centre/periphery dynamic in which most Libyans are more readily able to connect at a personal and emotional level to 'their periphery' renders local media exceedingly effective as it is trusted and seen as legitimate by its target audience and able to reinforce their local 'asabiyya (solidarity) networks. On the question of the dominance of local dynamics in Libya's post Qadhafi politics, consult (Lacher 2013).
 16. Interview with Michel Cousins by Mirco Keilberth in August 2012.
 17. Interview with Faisal Swehli by Mirco Keilberth in Tripoli, December 2011.
 18. Primary author's conversation with Libyan journalists in Tripoli, October 2012.
 19. Primary author's conversation with employees of the LRT in October 2012.
 20. Primary author's conversations with members of LRT staff in Tripoli in July 2012.
 21. Personal conversation in June 2012 with Taher Zarooq, executive manager of the Libyan National Media Union.
 22. According to the commission to support the press Law No. 44 was abolished on 26.06.2012 (libyanpress.com)
 23. By comparison, Tunisia's INRIC (Instance Nationale pour la regulation de l'information et communication) was created with the mandate to consult the government in the process of reforming media legislation and regulation. The commission drafted a law which was internationally recognized as a state-of-the-art piece of legislation that would effectively protect the freedom of the press and encourage the development of a pluralistic media scene. The creation of an independent regulatory authority was part of that proposal. The law was promulgated by the interim government in late 2011. The newly elected government decided to revoke the promulgation and redraft the law. As of November 2012, journalists and publishers are being sentenced according to old laws and the entire process of reforming media law is on hold.
 24. For further information on the committee see its website Libyanpress.com
 25. Primary author's conversation with Idris al-Mismari on October 3, 2012 in Tripoli.

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